

Statement of the Honorable Tim Bishop  
General Debate on H.R. 609  
March 29, 2006

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong opposition to this bill. I spent nearly 30 years working on a college campus. Based on my experience, I have three major concerns with H.R. 609.

First, in my view, this legislation – coupled with the budget cuts authorized by this Congress and further cuts proposed by the President – threatens to return the state of higher education in America to the pre-World War II era. Back then, only five percent of Americans had a college degree – compared with nearly 30 percent today.

This bill does little, if anything, to make college more affordable or expand access to Americans pursuing the dream of a college education. The bill is another step backwards in a retreat from affordability and access.

Second, I oppose this bill because the federal government should not be in the business of telling colleges and universities that we know better than them when it comes to making decisions concerning the price of tuition, the transfer of credit, and academic freedom and integrity. Yet, this is what this bill does.

This bill is based on a flawed ideology that colleges and universities are not capable of governing themselves and thus, need to be directed by Congress. Our solution to this accountability problem is more intrusion into the day-to-day operations of colleges and universities. It's wrong for us to be dictating these decisions, and it's insulting to the colleges.

Worse, this ideology is inconsistent with the reality of what is actually happening on a college campus. It's illogical that Congress imposes government oversight into academia but does conduct the same oversight for the oil and pharmaceutical industries, to name just two.

Third, while this bill lacks confidence in the not-for-profit higher education sector, it shows strong confidence in the for-profit sector. As a result, there is less accountability and oversight for that sector.

I want to be clear that there are great many for-profit schools that have been doing a great job for a long time. But there is also a long history in the for-profit sector of defrauding students, parents, taxpayers, and Congress, there is equal skepticism towards a sector of higher education with a stellar record of achievement – the non-profit sector.

By relaxing safeguards put into place to keep students and taxpayers safe against fraud by proprietary institutions, Congress is essentially giving the for-profit sector their stamp of approval.

For these reasons, Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to vote for the Democratic substitute and against final passage.